



NONSUCH REGAINED: 2012 LAMAS PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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Nonsuch, the most flamboyant and celebrated of the royal palaces of Tudor England, is gone. Built by Henry VIII, Nonsuch was demolished between 1682 and 1688/90 by George, Lord Berkeley, the last keeper of the house, who in 1682 had purchased its materials from Charles II's former mistress, Barbara Villiers, Baroness Nonsuch. Even the exact site of the palace was uncertain until its foundations were revealed by archaeological excavation in 1959 (Biddle 1961; Biddle & Summerson 1982). The later occupation of

the palace left a rich finds assemblage (Biddle 2005), including the fragments of many wine bottles (Biddle 2013). Today the site of the vanished palace is an area of parkland situated within the London Borough of Sutton and the Borough of Epsom and Ewell.

Begun on 22 April 1538, the first day of the thirtieth year of Henry's reign, the structure was substantially complete by the end of 1540, but the external decorations, including stuccoes of Roman emperors, gods, goddesses, the Labours and Adventures of



Fig 1. Joris Hoefnagel, 'Nonsuch Palace, the south front', watercolour (dated 1568) (In private possession/Christies)

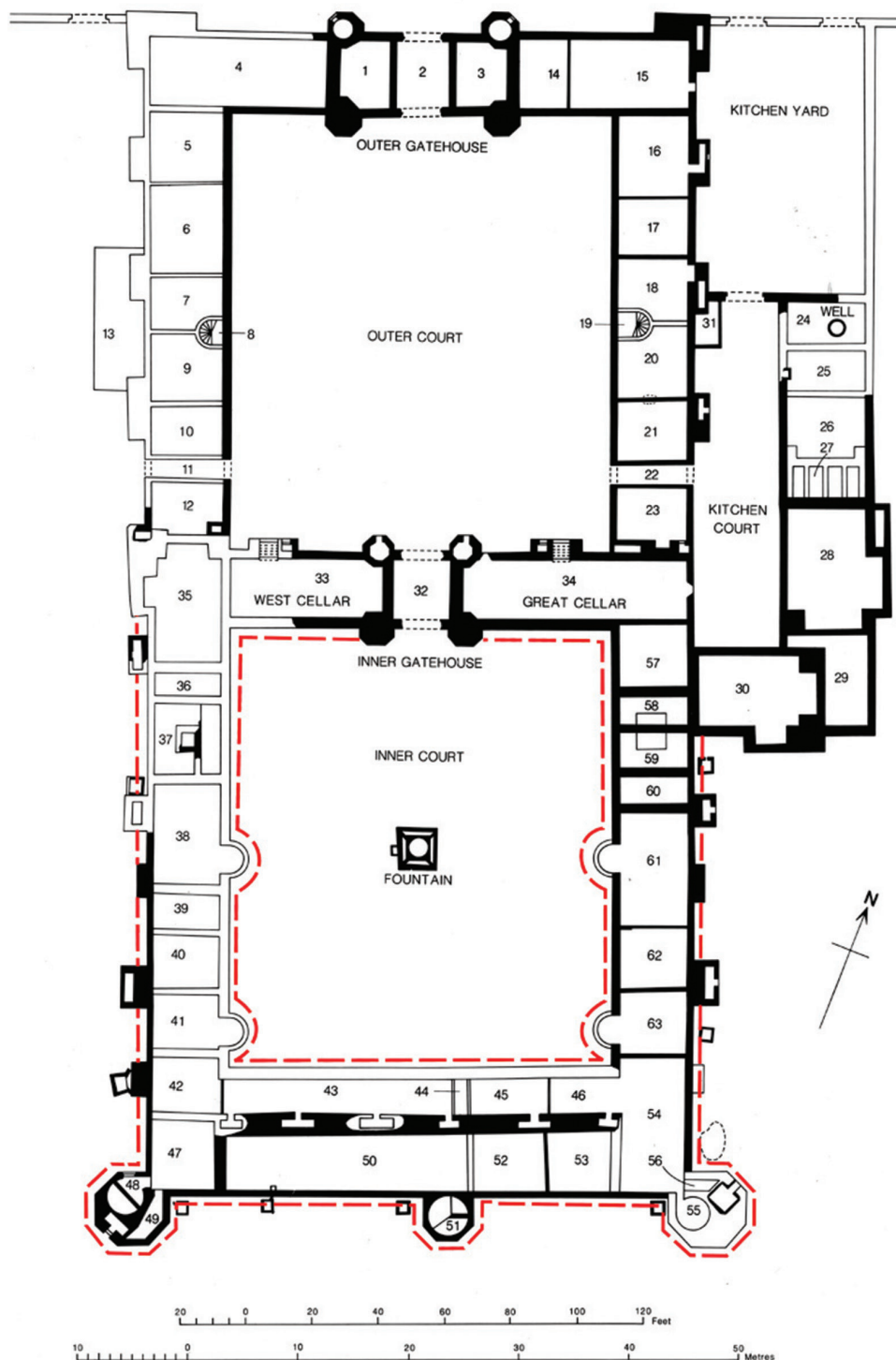


Fig 2. Plan of Nonsuch Palace as revealed by excavation in 1959, showing in red the extent of the decorative scheme around the inward- and outward-facing walls of the Inner Court (Martin Biddle)



Hercules, and the Liberal Arts and Virtues took another six years, and were only completed shortly before the king's death in January 1547 (Fig 1) (Biddle 1984; 2010).

Two years earlier John Leland, the King's Antiquary, had written of Nonsuch in his Latin poem about a swan's journey down the Thames from Oxford to Greenwich:

How great an emulation there of Roman antiquity? How much of very beautiful painting? How much of gold? How much indeed of every kind of ornament?

The name 'Nonnesuche' is found for the first time in English in the building accounts for July 1538, six weeks or so after the start of works. It was soon in common parlance. In 1565 Nicholas Chytraeus of Rostock, one of the earliest of many foreign visitors, lauded the palace in Latin verses memorably translated by Richard Bentley for Horace Walpole:

This which no equal has in Art or Fame,
Britons deservedly do Nonesuch name.

The excavation showed that the palace was arranged around two courtyards, each entered by an imposing gatehouse (Fig 2). John Evelyn in his diary for January 1666 distinguished between the two courtyards, 'the first is of stone Castle like ... the other of Timber a Gotique fabric, but ... incomparably beautified' (Biddle & Summerson 1982, 196). Here is the key contrast: the Outer Court entered by its broad gatehouse, crenellated, with the kitchen court to the east, was a typical piece of Tudor domestic architecture, rather grand, very like Hampton Court or St James's. The taller Inner Gatehouse was also 'gotique', but opened up a flight 'not of one or two as in the Pantheon at Rome, but of eight steps' into another world. The palace was surrounded by gardens and park land (Biddle 1999).

How was it possible to recreate Nonsuch, 'incomparably beautified', as a model? The ground plan revealed by excavation provided accurate measurements. There are also four pictures. A watercolour of the south front flanked by twin towers was drawn by Joris Hoefnagel in 1568 (Fig 1). Reworked, perhaps in the same year, with Queen Elizabeth in her coach in the foreground and engraved by Franz Hogenberg for the *Theatre of*

the Cities of the World, published in 1598, this became the iconic view of Nonsuch. Another view of the south front, engraved by Jacobus Hondius (Josse de Hondt) in 1610, possibly after a drawing made by him during his time in England in 1583–93, was published by John Speed in 1611 in his *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* (Fig 3).

The north front appears in two oil paintings. That in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, perhaps painted in 1610–12 for Henry, Prince of Wales, shows Nonsuch from the north-west. The other, painted by Hendrik Danckerts in 1666–79 and showing the palace from the north-east, is in Berkeley Castle; a second version is in the care of the Borough of Epsom and Ewell.

There are also three vital pieces of information about height. The royal apartments on the first floor of the Inner Court are recorded as 18ft high. And great timbers 80ft long for the twin towers flanking the south front were searched for throughout the southern counties in 1538 and brought to the site in a specially-made cart, 'the king's great wain'. A third indication of size is provided by the one complete stucco panel, found in fragments at the foot of the south-west tower (Fig 4). This panel is just under 4ft 5in high and 2ft 9½in wide. Because most of the stuccoes were set within the regular timber framing of the Inner Court and appear to have been of a standard size, this panel provided the crucial module for reconstructing the decorative facades.

Using the ground plan, the pictures, and the indications of height, Simon Hayfield of Hayfield Studio drew twelve scale elevations, one for each of the four outer faces of the palace and one for each of the four inward-facing walls of the two courts. Constant cross-reference was needed to resolve the many problems of the sometimes conflicting visual evidence, and to evaluate the written accounts of visitors, the Parliamentary surveyors of 1649, and a long Latin description, written perhaps 1582 by Anthony Watson for John, Lord Lumley, then owner Nonsuch.

The greatest problem was how to settle within the given dimensions of length and height the arrangement of the stucco decoration on the inward-facing walls of the Inner Court. One of the ironies of the evidence for Nonsuch is that we have pictures of the

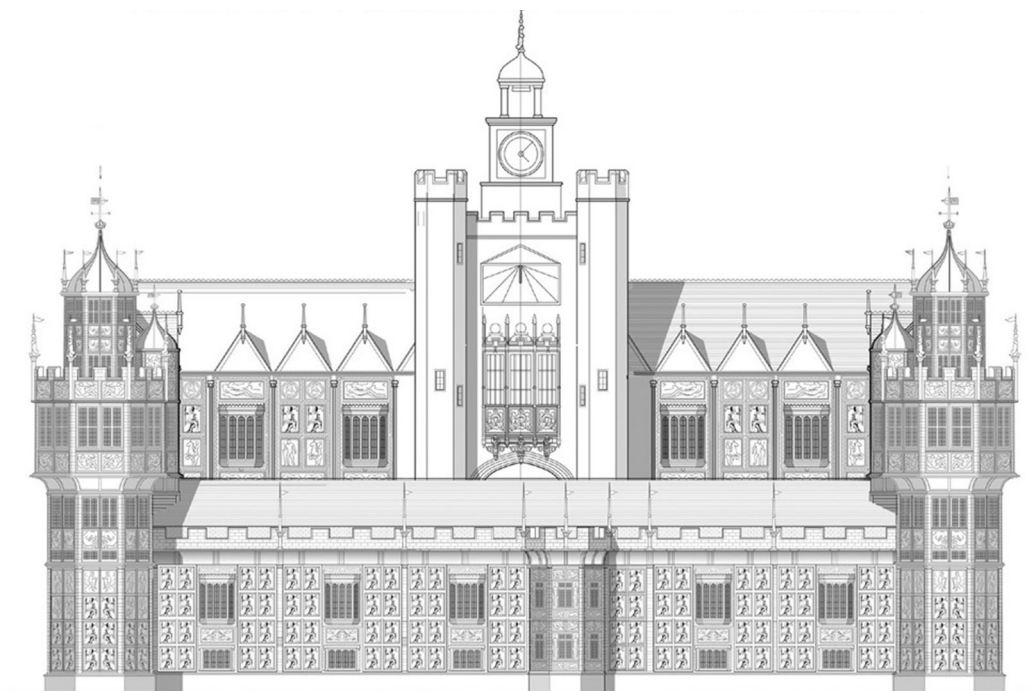
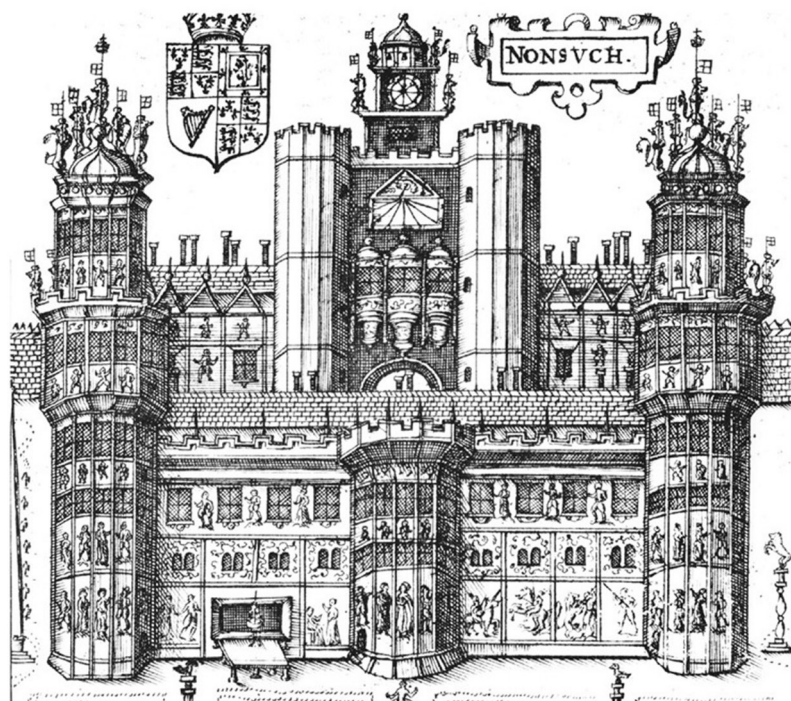


Fig 3. Jodocus Hondius, Nonsuch Palace, a bird's eye-view, from 'Surrey Described and Divided into Hundreds' (1610), engraving in John Speed, 'Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine' (London, 1610), above, compared with Simon Hayfield's reconstruction of the same view based on archaeological and architectural evidence, below (Biddle/Hayfield)



Fig 4. William Kendall(?) and his company, reconstruction by David Honour of a stucco panel (136.8 by 89cm) showing a Roman soldier seated on his shield, found in fragments at the foot of the south-west tower (Honour/English Heritage)

stucco decoration of the outward-facing walls of the Inner Court but no written accounts; and detailed written descriptions of the decoration of the inward-looking walls but virtually no pictorial evidence, only a glimpse over the roof of the south front on de Hondt's engraving of 1610 (Fig 3).

Difficult too was the resolution of the differences between Hoefnagel's and de Hondt's views of the south front. In Hoefnagel's watercolour the whole ground floor is hidden behind the Privy Garden wall (Fig 1). He also shows five sides of each of the twin octagon towers, whereas one can only see three sides of an octagon from any one point. By contrast Hoefnagel shows the central bay straight on. He must have sketched from at least three, perhaps from as many as five points, and combined sketches in the studio. The result is that Hoefnagel's view, made famous throughout Europe by the engraving of 1598, makes the south front look lower and the twin towers fatter than they actually were.

De Hondt's engraving of 1610, at first sight naive, is more accurate overall. Direct comparison between his engraving and a photograph of the new model taken from the same high-level shows this to remarkable effect (Fig 6). The figures on the south front and twin towers, over-simplified and dressed in later sixteenth-century costume, serve only to show that the building was decorated from the ground up with superimposed registers of human figures. But the general shape of the building is right, a remarkable and early example of the art of the bird's-eye view (Fig 3).

Hoefnagel's detail is by contrast extraordinary. Individual scenes can be identified, huge figures known as 'terms' are shown placed to either side of the central bay, and one of the panels on the south-west tower can be identified with the stucco of a Roman soldier seated on his shield found in fragments on the ground directly below (Fig 4). Such detail can only be explained if Hoefnagel sketched close up and later combined his notes, as his problems with the overall massing of the south front also suggest. Described as the greatest miniaturist of the end of the Middle Ages, the detail of Hoefnagel's watercolour shows the extraordinary skill with which he worked.

Similar problems are presented by the paintings of the north front. The detail of the early 17th-century painting from the north-west is simpler but its geometry is more accurate and not influenced by a wish to show more than would in fact be possible from a single point. The later painting from the north-east, when compared with a photograph of the new model (built on a dimensionally accurate plan), shows that Danckerts elongated his view to show a detailed (and highly important) view of the east facade of the Inner Court, something unobtainable from the point from which his painting appears to have been taken. Like Hoefnagel's, his painting must depend on bringing together in the studio field sketches ('painting notes') taken from more than one point of view.

In the summer of 2010, the Friends of Nonsuch, appointed Ben Taggart of Model Houses to build the model. Ben's first question was: 'Have you made a roof plan?' We had not. As Ben explained, the roof of a model is the first thing anyone sees. Making a roof plan proved difficult (Fig 5). The excavated plan showed exactly where the fireplaces were at ground level, but on Danckerts' painting the chimneys were out of kilter compared with other high features, such as the twin towers or the turrets of the gatehouses. He had clearly put his view together from sketches taken from different points, but it also emerged that on the two versions of his painting the same chimneys might appear on different sides of the same ridge, something which presumably arose in the studio from different interpretations of what exactly the sketches showed. The making of the model proved an object lesson in the use of early views as evidence (Biddle 2011).

The model (Fig 6) shows the palace as it was about 1625, the cupola over the chapel beside the Inner Gatehouse probably being built in anticipation of the arrival of a Catholic consort for the future Charles I, whether the intended Infanta Maria of Spain or his eventual bride, Henrietta Maria of France.

A new perception of Nonsuch emerged from the making of the model. The Parliamentary survey of 1649 describes the twin towers flanking the south front as 'the cheife

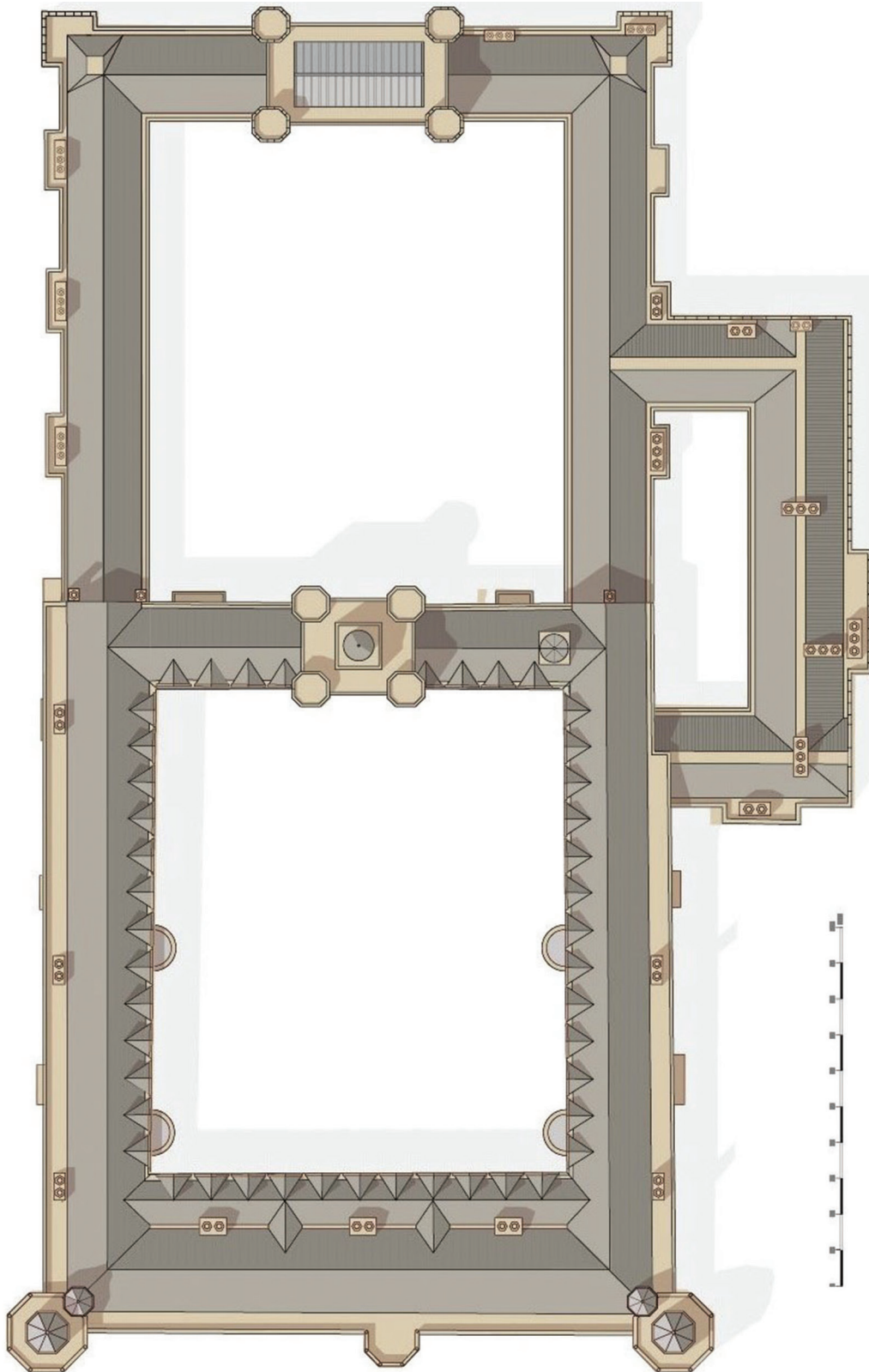


Fig 5. Plan of the roofs of Nonsuch Palace, reconstruction by Simon Hayfield (Biddle/ Hayfield)



Fig 6. Nonsuch Palace, the model by Ben Taggart, looking north across the Inner Court to the Outer Court beyond (Modelhouses/Taggart/Biddle; photo John Crook)



ornament of the whole house of Nonsuch'. These were 'prospect towers' five stories tall from which to watch hunting and enjoy the view. What has not previously been realised is that the towers were linked at the level of the battlements by a projecting wall walk which extended north along the outer west and east sides of the Inner Court, looking down over the Priy Garden. Coved in stucco and cantilevered on substantial iron brackets sheathed in lead, these prospect walks were described by the surveyors as battlements, 'a very greate grace and a special ornament to the whole building' (see cover). A restored portion of something similar flanks Sharington's tower at Lacock.

This elaboration of the facades was enhanced along the outer walls of the south front by projecting oriel windows, each supported by the brackets shown on both Hoefnagel's and de Hondt's views (Figs 1 and 3). Oriel windows are also shown by de Hondt on the inward-looking north face of the court, and can be assumed, as on the model, to have continued along the other walls, flanking the pairs of bow windows whose foundations were revealed by excavation. The high relief of the white stucco figures set in black frames of gilded 'slate' between the oriel and bow windows gave to the facades of Nonsuch a complexity, a corrugated, rippling effect previously unappreciated (see cover).

Complexity of relief was matched by the use of colour, another feature in the decoration of Nonsuch not previously recognised. The heads of the Roman emperors were of terracotta (Fig 7). The white stucco panels were each framed by borders of carved black 'slate', their patterns highlighted by gilding. 'How much of gold?', Leland had exclaimed. And set within frames of moulded stucco were an unknown number of 'good paintings of Rubens or Holben's doing', as Samuel Pepys, an excellent judge, noted in his diary for 21 September 1665. 'How much of very beautiful painting?', Leland had added over a century earlier. In the Vatican, at Mantua, and at Fontainebleau, the stuccoes often framed paintings. So it was at Nonsuch.

The richness of relief and colour was matched by scale. The decorated facades were over 900ft in length, extending over a surface of more than 11,000 sq ft, with some 700 stucco panels set within more than 5,000

linear feet of gilded slate borders. Sheer size was not least among the attributes of Nonsuch (Biddle 1984; 2010).

To reflect this complexity Ben Taggart built the model in wood with architectural details added in various plastics, fibre-glass resin, and brass. It was not practical to carve by hand each of the 695 stucco panels that were needed. Instead, 149 panels were carved with various figures, cast in silicon rubber moulds and reproduced in plaster resin. These 'master' panels were then arranged so that no duplicate panels were near to one another, giving the impression that each panel is unique.

On the original building the stucco panels were surrounded by narrow borders of black 'slate' carved with guilloches — braided patterns — outlined in gold. These were reproduced using thin brass sheet acid-etched with the pattern. The brass was sprayed with black paint and gently sanded with emery paper so that the brass is visible in the etched pattern, to represent the original gilding of the 'slate'.

The terracotta busts of the emperors were cast in resin and painted. The 'good paintings of Rubens or Holben's doing' were imitated coloured as they might have been in the 16th century. Ben Taggart took over thirty weeks to complete the model. The model is currently on display in the Service Wing Museum and Nonsuch Palace Gallery, at the Mansion House in Nonsuch Park. A second model by Ben Taggart, at half the scale, is in the Whitehall Museum in Cheam.

But why in the first place construct a building so 'incomparably beautified'? Planned within weeks of the birth to Jane Seymour of Edward, Henry VIII's longed for legitimate male heir, it is the subjects of the stuccoes adorning the facades of the royal apartments around the Inner Court which provide the key. These are arranged in three registers (Fig 8, *cf* Fig 7). Uppermost were the busts of Julius Caesar and 31 Roman emperors from Augustus to Æmilianus, each apparently represented by a terracotta bust in a circular wreath. Beneath, on the king's side of the court, the west, were 15 Roman gods and on the queen's side opposite 15 goddesses, each named in letters of gilded lead nailed to the stucco and some at least provided with admonitory mottoes in Latin,



Fig 7. Nonsuch Palace, the Inner Court, looking south-west, showing the decorative scheme, with the terracotta heads of the Roman emperors in the topmost register (cf. Fig. 8) (Modelhouses/ Taggart/ Biddle: photo John Crook)



The queen's side (east)	South range (centre)	The king's side (west)
<i>Upper register</i>		<i>Upper register</i>
16 Caesars		16 Caesars
<i>Middle register</i>	Henry and Edward	<i>Middle register</i>
15 Goddesses		15 Gods
<i>Lower register</i>		<i>Lower register</i>
16 Liberal Arts and Virtues		16 Labours of Hercules
<i>Entry to Inner Court</i>		

Fig 8. The iconography of the three registers of the decoration on the inward-facing walls of the Inner Court of Nonsuch Palace: a summary

for example, 'Repentance attends on Venus'. Beneath, in the lowest register on the king's side, were 16 Labours and Adventures of Hercules, perhaps the longest series in art (Biddle 1984). Opposite on the queen's side of the court were figures of the Liberal Arts and Virtues, each with a personification, for example Socrates, and a motto, in his case *Nosce teipsum*, 'Know thyself'. As a German visitor remarked in 1613 of the queen's side there was 'a variety of pagan stories of naked women'.

King Henry seated in the curule throne of the Roman senate with Prince Edward by his side surveyed the scene from the centre of the south side of the court (Fig 7). The emperors, the gods and goddesses, the heroic Hercules, and the Arts and Virtues surrounding them were at once a lesson for the prince, an apotheosis of the king and his son, and a tutelary pageant in which the ancients, by the virtue inherent in their very figures, seem to have been held to ensure the future of the dynasty (Biddle 2012).

Nonsuch was the greatest work of English royal propaganda before the 19th century. Divided into the king's side and the queen's, designed for the education and enlightenment of a prince on whom such hope rested, it seems to have been intended as a family home, remote, secluded within its park, without a great hall or even, until the early 17th century, a major chapel. Here, Henry may possibly have thought, after Jane Seymour's death following Edward's birth, it might be possible to live for brief intervals a quieter life with his young son and a new queen. It was not to be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The model of Nonsuch Palace was designed and made by Ben Taggart of Model Houses, based upon reconstruction elevations drawn by Simon Hayfield. The image on the cover of this volume of the *Transactions* and Figs 6 and 7 are from photographs by John Crook.

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